

# NEPONSET VALLEY COMMUNITY HEALTH COALITION

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July 28, 2010

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Public Charities Division/ Caritas Transaction  
Office of Attorney General Martha Coakley  
One Ashburton Place  
Boston, MA 02108

RE: Public comment

Dear Attorney General Coakley:

The Neponset Valley Community Health Coalition was formed in 1997 in response to the Neponset Valley Health System's (NVHS) planned acquisition by Columbia/HCA, a for-profit healthcare company. The founding members were recruited by contacting individuals, healthcare and social service agencies, government agencies, and private companies. After Columbia/HCA withdrew its offer to acquire NVHS, Caritas Christi Health Care System entered negotiations with NVHS. The Coalition outlined its community concerns in the Determination of Need (DON) process set forth by the MA Department of Public Health.

The Coalition remains active in Norwood Hospital's service communities with the mission of advocating for maintenance and enhancement of affordable, accessible quality healthcare. As part of this it is imperative that the Caritas Christi system, specifically Norwood Hospital, remain a strong entity to provide healthcare to the community. The acquisition by Cerberus and the influx of capital is necessary to strengthen the community hospitals and ensure access to quality care.

As part of the transaction to Cerberus, the Coalition is in support of forming a foundation to fund the unmet health needs in the community. An example of such a need is the Elder Dental Program which has a yearly struggle to find funding sources. The group is a community-based, non-profit program dedicated to helping local elders access quality dental care. The program has a network of local dentists who volunteer to treat low-income elders at significantly reduced fees. The program addresses a large gap in care which has only grown wider with recent Fiscal Year 2011 cuts to MassHealth Adult Dental.

In addition to a foundation, the Coalition feels that there are four primary areas of concern: Behavioral Health, Staffing Levels, Community Benefits and Governance.

## 1. Behavioral Health Services

Currently, Norwood Hospital has a 21-bed adult psychiatric inpatient unit, 12-bed adult psychiatric unit for patients with less demanding physical needs, and 28-bed geropsychiatric unit for patients 55 or older. The coalition would like to see Cerberus maintain or increase those numbers.

Norwood Hospital should become a MassHealth provider of behavioral health services.

The Partial Day Program for Behavioral Health patients should be re-instated.

2. Staffing levels

Maintain current staffing levels to ensure quality of care, including all services and personnel. The support and administrative divisions are vital to quality of care as much as nursing services.

3. Governance

The Coalition would like to ensure local representation on the Board of Governors for the system, and continue the local Board of Norwood Hospital with the current formula for membership.

4. Community Benefits

At present, there is no full-time community benefits coordinator associated solely with Norwood Hospital. Currently, there is one regional community benefits coordinator serving the entire region. Each hospital has distinct and particular needs and, therefore, Cerberus should hire one full-time appropriately trained community benefits employee to work solely on community benefits for the Norwood Hospital service area.

Norwood Hospital operates a cancer treatment center in Foxboro. Existing transportation services that are available for elders and individuals with disabilities do not go into the Town of Foxboro. Therefore, there is limited access to oncology services for hospital patients. We are requesting that Cerberus agree to provide transportation for patients from Norwood Hospital to the oncology center in Foxboro.

In recent years, programs have been reduced and eliminated such as the following: Lunch and Learn Program that provided health education to local business and other organizations; educational programs, designed especially for seniors; quarterly meetings held with public health directors and senior center directors and outreach workers; participation by Caritas Christi in COBTH; and, increased partnerships with area schools and coalition—just to name a few examples. It would also be beneficial if a system-wide coordinated focus could be established whereby 1-3 key areas of community benefit could be identified and best practices could be utilized throughout the system to strengthen the Caritas Christi's position among the major health care systems.

To ensure these items are addressed and continue during Cerberus' ownership the Coalition would recommend that the group report to the Public Health Council on a yearly basis on the progress of the categories above. The Coalition does not want to be an obstruction to the transaction but rather a participant in the negotiations to strengthen the outcome.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Sigale Reiss, MPH, RS  
Superintendent/ Director  
Norwood Health Department  
On behalf of the Coalition

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – List of Recipients

## **Attachment A**

For your information this letter has been sent to the following:

State Senator Brian A. Joyce  
State Senator Marian Walsh  
State Senator James E. Timilty  
State Senator Karen Spilka  
State Senator Richard J. Ross  
State Representative John H. Rogers  
State Representative Paul McMurtry  
State Representative William C. Galvin  
State Representative Lida E. Harkins  
State Representative F. Jay Barrows  
State Representative Pam Richardson  
State Representative Tom Sannicandro  
State Representative Elizabeth A. Poirier  
State Representative Louis L. Kafka  
State Representative Steven J. D'Amico

John J. Carroll  
Town of Norwood

Ralph de la Torre, MD, President/CEO  
Caritas Christi

Robert Guyon, Chief Operating Officer  
Caritas Christi

Margaret Hanson, President  
Norwood Hospital

Public Health Council

Dr. JudyAnn Bigby, Secretary  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

John Auerbach  
Commissioner of the Department of Public Health

Michael Bellotti  
Norfolk County Sheriff's Office

William R. Keating  
Norfolk County District Attorney